

TERRORISM IN INDIA DURING THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

PETER HEEHS

BECAUSE THE IMAGE OF MAHATMA GANDHI and the ultimate success of his nonviolent methods have dominated Western views of the movement for India's independence, many believe that India achieved its freedom without resorting to violence. In fact, violent resistance was preached and practiced throughout the independence movement and had a significant effect on its course and outcome. Gandhi himself was forced to acknowledge the sincerity of revolutionary terrorists. He claimed to admire the patriotism of the terrorists, though he had "no faith whatsoever in their method." Most scholars agree that the existence of terrorism made it easier for Gandhi's nonviolent movement to accomplish its goals. This study of Indian terrorism—its nature, sources, goals, and its relationship with nonviolent resistance—sheds light on both the Indian independence movement in the first half of the twentieth century and the return of terrorism at the end of this century.¹

The effectiveness of the British in disarming the populace by means of the Arms Act of 1878 made it impossible for Indian revolutionaries to organize large-scale operations. As a result, those who favored violent resistance were drawn into terrorism. Many early writers on the movement preferred the unwieldy coinage "militant nationalism," which might have suited the sort of operation Indian revolutionaries dreamed of—an armed uprising throughout the country. However, they succeeded only once in putting together an organized military force in World War II when the Indian National Army took part in the Japanese invasion of Assam. All other attempts at armed resistance against the British were relatively small-scale acts of covert violence such as armed robberies and assassinations of officials and collaborators. Since 1970, most writers on the Indian freedom

Peter Heehs lives in Pondicherry, India, and is connected with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives and Research Library. His latest book, The Bomb in Bengal: The Origins of Revolutionary Terrorism in India, 1900–1910, has just been published by Oxford University Press.

¹ M. K. Gandhi, "To the Indian Critics," 23 January 1930, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi, various dates), 42:423.

movement have used the term "revolutionary terrorism" or simply "terrorism" to describe the activities of Indian revolutionaries.²

The first act of terrorism in India clearly associated with the freedom movement was the 1897 assassination of a British official in charge of enforcing anti-plague regulations in Poona near Bombay. Two brothers named Chapekar had found the official's methods offensive to Hindu sensibilities and killed him because "he made himself an enemy of our religion." According to one of the brothers, if the official had been "careful not to interfere with our religion . . . we would not have been compelled to perpetrate the deed." Such religious motivation led the British government to conclude that this "criminal conspiracy connected with the revolutionary movement in India [had] no definite political aims."³

True political terrorism arose at the beginning of the twentieth century in Bengal and spread from there to other provinces. Terrorists from Bombay, Madras, Punjab, and the United Provinces were often more successful than their Bengali counterparts, yet terrorist activities in these regions were less prevalent. In Bengal they were commonplace for three decades. An official government report mentions 210 "revolutionary outrages" and 101 more attempts in Bengal involving over one thousand terrorists between 1906 and 1917. After a decade of relative quiet, terrorism again broke out in the province. An official list gives 189 incidents in Bengal during the years 1930–1934. Outside Bengal terrorist incidents were so infrequent that they were not even itemized in the official report.⁴

In 1906 radical politicians whom historians now call "Extremists" put forward the goal of India's independence. The first newspapers to do so were Bengali weeklies called *Jugantar* (The new age) and *Sandhya* (Evening, or "Period of transition"). They used *swadhinata* (independence) and *swaraj*, a clipped form of *swarajya*, which means "own kingdom" or "dominion." *Swarajya* occurs infrequently in Sanskrit literature, but was used to indicate

² M. A. Buch, *Rise and Growth of Indian Militant Nationalism* (Baroda, 1940); R. C. Majumdar, "The Genesis of Extremism," in A. Gupta, ed. *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* (Calcutta, 1958); Bimanbehari Majumdar, *Militant Nationalism in India* (Calcutta, 1966); Gopal Halder, "Revolutionary Terrorism," in *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*; Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1973), 465–92; Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi, 1989).

³ Damodar Chapekar, "Autobiography" (official translation from Marathi), in *Source Material for a History of the Freedom Movement in India* (Bombay, 1958), 2:1014; S. A. T. Rowlatt et al., *Report of Committee Appointed to Investigate Revolutionary Conspiracies in India* (London, 1918) (hereafter cited as *Rowlatt Report*), paras. 3, 20. This report is generally considered reliable and is cited by the terrorists in their own writings.

⁴ *Rowlatt Report*, para. 168; Government of Bengal, Political Department, *Memorandum on the History of Terrorism in Bengal, 1905–1933* (Calcutta, 1933), West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta (hereafter cited as WBSA), appendix II.

the territories under Maratha rule. The term was revived at the end of the nineteenth century by B. G. Tilak, an Extremist of western India, and became the primary term of Indian political discourse.⁵

The objectives of the Extremists and Moderates in the Indian National Congress were epitomized by their interpretation of *swaraj*. Dadabhai Naoroji, an old-line Moderate, was thought daring in 1906 when he said that the aim of the Congress should be to attain *swaraj* in the sense of "colonial self-government" such as was then enjoyed by Canada, Australia, and other white colonies. Aurobindo Ghose, a leading Bengali Extremist, interpreted *swaraj* differently in his influential English-language newspaper *Bande Mataram* (Salutation to Mother India). He defined it as complete political independence, "a free national government unhampered even in the least by foreign control." Lord Minto, viceroy of India from 1905 to 1910, and Indian Moderates who courted British favor considered the claim for self-government to be madness or too far in the future to be a matter of immediate concern. Many young Bengalis, however, believed *swaraj* could be achieved in a few years, especially if their demands were backed by dynamite.⁶



Aurobindo Ghose after acquittal in the *Bande Mataram* sedition trial, 1907.

⁵ Translated extracts from *Jugantar* and *Sandhya* in *Report on Native Newspapers in Bengal*, weekly police intelligence report, WBSA; selections from *Jugantar* in Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee, *Bharater Swadhinata Andolane "Jugantar" Patrikar Dan* (The contribution of *Jugantar* to the Indian freedom movement) (Calcutta, 1972); M. G. Ranade, *Rise of the Maratha Power* (Bombay, 1900), 25; Sri Aurobindo [Ghose], *On Himself* (Pondicherry, 1972), 15n, 25.

⁶ G. A. Natesan, ed., *Congress Presidential Addresses* (Madras, 1935), 724; Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram: Early Political Writings* (Pondicherry, 1972), 92; Minto (viceroy) to Morley (secretary of state for India), 13 May 1909, in Mary, Countess of Minto, *India: Minto and Morley: 1905-1910* (London, 1934), 305; G. K. Gokhale, speech of July 1909, in *Karmayogin* 4 (17 July 1909): 14; B. G. Tilak, interview of 1907, in H. W. Nevins, *The New Spirit in India* (Delhi, 1975), 72.

Many Extremist politicians had contacts with active terrorists. Tilak gave legal advice as well as covert aid to the Chapekar brothers. Ghose was one of the founders of a secret society that turned to terrorism under his brother Barindra Kumar ("Barin") Ghose. He and his associates Upendranath Bannerjee and Hemchandra Das argued that complete independence was India's primary need and vital to national unity, as well as to economic and social progress. They sometimes presented economic and historical arguments to justify their demand, but its real basis was a conviction that the British had no right to rule India. One revolutionary wrote that the men who joined the political movement did so "simply out of an innate hatred of British rule." Although Aurobindo Ghose admitted to having "a strong hatred for the British," he kept this feeling out of his writings and supported his demand for independence with an appeal to the inherent right of peoples to self-government. "The primary requisite for national progress, national reform," he proclaimed in 1907, "is the free habit of free and healthy national thought and action which is impossible in a state of servitude."⁷

Few of the youths who joined the Bengali terrorist movement were won over by such reasoned arguments. The emotional appeal of pamphlets, songs, dramas, and the inflammatory writings of such papers as *Jugantar* prodded them to action. All these media condemned the injustice, arrogance, and immorality of Europeans and extolled the ancient, suppressed glory of Mother India. To be great again, India had first to be free.

Like most Bengali groups, Barin Ghose's secret society was small, urban-based, and made up almost entirely of young Hindus of the *bhadralok* (respectable) class. Of the thirty-six members for whom adequate records exist, thirty-two belonged to the three castes that make up the Bengali *bhadralok*. The six leaders had an average age of thirty-six, while the thirty rank-and-file members had an average age of twenty. The older men were professionals, primarily teachers and journalists; the younger men were students or former students. These numbers remained remarkably constant during the first phase of the movement through World War I.⁸

Bengali terrorism was shaped by both indigenous religious and foreign revolutionary influences. This dual influence resulted in the creation of antagonistic religious and revolutionary factions, but members of both

⁷ Barindra Kumar Ghose, *Agnijug* (Days of fire) (Calcutta, n.d.); Upendranath Bannerjee, *Nirbasiter Atmakatha* (Autobiography of an exile) (Calcutta, 1976); Hemchandra Kanungo [Das], *Banglay Biplab Pracheshta* (Calcutta, 1928); Mukherjee and Mukherjee, eds., "*Jugantar*" *Patrika*, 74, 95, 98; Arun Chandra Guha, *First Spark of Revolution* (New Delhi, 1971), 33; talk of 12 December 1940, Sri Aurobindo papers, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, Pondicherry; Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, 86.

⁸ Government of Bengal, political confidential file 24 of 1909, WBSA; *Rowlatt Report*, appendix 2.

factions embraced a common goal of political liberation. British observers regarded terrorism as a perversion of religion; nonreligious terrorists saw it the opposite way. In his writings and speeches Aurobindo Ghose proposed what has been called a "religion of nationalism," where nationalism was regarded as not only high and noble but divinely ordained. This Extremist politician and revolutionary organizer argued:

It is not by any mere political programme, not by National Education alone, not by *Swadeshi* [use of indigenous products] alone, not by Boycott alone, that this country can be saved. . . . These are merely ways of working; they are merely particular concrete lines upon which the spirit of God is working in a Nation, but they are not in themselves the one thing needful. What is the one thing needful? . . . [It is] the idea that there is a great power at work to help India, and that we are doing what it bids us.

Ghose came by his conviction of divine leadership not through the profession of Hinduism as a creed but through the practice of yoga, a spiritual discipline also practiced by other Extremists and revolutionaries. Leaders as well as the rank and file were strongly influenced by such Hindu scriptures as the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Devi Mahatmyam* but usually did not approach these texts as orthodox believers. Many young Bengalis, including some future terrorists, were influenced by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902). Revolutionary (and later Comintern leader) M. N. Roy was impressed by Vivekananda's insistence on self-reliance and "man-making," not the fundamentally spiritual content of his message.⁹

Another nineteenth-century Bengali whose books influenced the terrorists was novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838–1894). He was profoundly influenced by Western thought and literature but eventually rejected the teachings of Comte and Mill for those of Sri Krishna, just as he rejected English and wrote his mature works in Bengali. Coming at the end of the "Bengal Renaissance," Chatterjee's works helped set in motion what Aurobindo Ghose called "the revolution of sentiment which promises to make the Bengalis a nation." Of all Chatterjee's writings, none fired the imagination of young Bengalis more than his historical novel *Ananda Math* (The abbey of bliss). Basing his work on accounts of a rebellion in the 1770s, Chatterjee transformed the bands of lawless brigands that roamed Bengal in those years into an Indian version of Robin Hood and his Merry Men. The aim of these virtuous outlaws is to restore the Mother-Motherland to its former glory and prosperity, which under Muslim misrule has been replaced by poverty and degradation. Although the bands wipe out the

⁹ Speech of Aurobindo Ghose, 19 January 1908, in Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, 659–60; J. C. Ker, *Political Trouble in India* (Calcutta, 1917), 48–51; Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works* (Calcutta, 1989), 3:220–22; M. N. Roy, *Selected Works of M. N. Roy*, ed. Sibnarayan Ray (Delhi, 1987), 1:332–33.

Muslim presence in the area, this does not lead to the establishment of a Hindu kingdom. In the last chapter, the leader of the group realizes that it is God's will that the British should govern the country for a while. This may have been Chatterjee's way of making his work acceptable to the rulers of the country, but it also reflected an attitude held by many nineteenth-century Bengalis. The Extremists and the terrorists drew from the book what served their purposes.¹⁰

Police sources and memoirs of participants attest to the influence of *Ananda Math* on Bengali revolutionaries. Barin Ghose acknowledged his debt to the novel and apparently tried to model his secret society in Calcutta, Bengal's capital, on Chatterjee's Hindu revolutionaries. One of Ghose's associates named the building that housed the Midnapore branch of the secret society "Ananda Math." The rationalist Hemchandra Das often ridiculed Chatterjee's influence but had to admit that *Ananda Math* had made a strong impression on him.¹¹

Bengali Extremists and terrorists were empathic toward other peoples struggling for independence or political empowerment, including Italian revolutionaries, the Boers in South Africa, and Japanese and Irish nationalists. Calcutta was "almost honeycombed" with self-styled secret societies in the late nineteenth century modeled on Italy's Carbonari (charcoal-burners), a secret society with a large membership. Members of these undergraduate clubs propounded nebulous political ideals but took few steps to achieve them. One member recalled that "there was nothing in our activities for the government or the people to worry about." These clubs disappeared before the end of the century, but when terrorist groups began to form around 1905, the biographies of some leading Italian nationalists became required reading. Bengali youths were exhilarated when Boer farmers harried British regulars and when the Japanese humbled Russia by land and sea. The Boer and Russo-Japanese wars formed part of the history curriculum at the school for revolutionaries set up by Barin Ghose in a Calcutta suburb, with teachers presenting the Boers and Japanese as underdogs who came out on top. Ghose wrote, somewhat anachronistically, in the 1940s that his "cult of violence" was "learnt from the Irish Seínfeinners and Russian secret societies."¹²

¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Harmony of Virtue* (Pondicherry, 1972), 95–98; Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *Ananda Math* (1882); William Wilson Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal* (London, 1897; reprint, London, 1970), 71.

¹¹ Ker, *Political Trouble*, 31–33; B. Ghose, *Agnijug*, 23; Government of Bengal, *Note on the Midnapore Revolutionary Conspiracy*, WBSA, 8; Kanungo [Das], *Banglay Biplab Pracheshta*, 1, 59, 158.

¹² Bipin Chandra Pal, *Memories of My Life and Times* (Calcutta, 1932), 246–48; Rabindranath Tagore, *Jibansmriti* (Reminiscences) (Calcutta, 1987), 86–91; Bhupendranath

When the first terrorist incidents took place in Bengal in 1908 the British press referred to the perpetrators as "anarchists." This was a highly charged term then prevalent in Europe. Lord Minto used the word in 1908 when he wrote that the bombs thrown by Bengali terrorists were "the products of an anarchical conspiracy originating in the Western world," which permitted him to reject the notion that the bombs were "the effects of a people struggling to relieve themselves from an oppressor." Minto's statement reveals more about the way the British saw their imperial mission than the actual state of affairs in Bengal. A British police official was more clear-sighted than Minto when he agreed with Aurobindo Ghose that "'anarchical' is not the proper description of the movements, organizations and crimes which have been troubling us." Upendranath Bannerjee asserted that the rise of secret societies in Bengal had nothing to do with anarchism but was caused by intolerable local conditions that similarly drove Italians, Poles, and Irishmen to revolt against foreign rule. Like them the Bengalis found "their honor trampled into the dust" and realized that under the Raj there was "no possibility of their ever becoming men." Therefore they undertook the "perilous duty of concentrating their feeble strength against the colossal British power."¹³

Two people connected with the rise of revolutionary activity in Bengal did have some contact with Russian anarchists. Margaret Noble, an Irish disciple of Vivekananda, whom he renamed Sister Nivedita, corresponded with one such anarchist, Peter Kropotkin, and later met him in London. One of his books, she wrote to a friend, confirmed her "determination towards Anarchism"—not necessarily the peaceful kind. Although she was "glad of every sovereign destroyed," she hoped that India, "the most civilized country in the world," might enter the promised land without violence. Nivedita helped organize *samitis* (societies) that promoted physical and moral education and social service among young Bengalis. She presented one of these groups with her collection of books on European revolutionary history, but there is no evidence that she spoke to them of Kropotkin's philosophical anarchism, much less the anarchist idea of "propaganda by the deed." The *samitis* Nivedita helped found eventually turned to terrorism, but it is difficult to determine her role. Nivedita once requested members of the party "not to tell her anything of the secret

Datta, *Swami Vivekananda Patriot-Prophet: A Study* (Calcutta, 1954), 167; B. Ghose, "Sri Aurobindo as I Understand Him" (unpublished manuscript, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, Pondicherry), 49.

¹³ Minto to Morley, 27 May 1908, Minto papers, National Library of Scotland; cf. Minto to Morley, 6 May 1908, *ibid.*; Cleveland note, 15 March 1910, in Government of India, Home Department Proceedings, series A (hereafter cited as GOI HDA), National Archives of India, April 1910, nos. 59–62; Bannerjee, *Nirbasiter Atmakatha*, i.

movement," yet she did help one young man gain access to a laboratory so he could experiment with explosives.¹⁴

The bombs of the anarchists, not their ideas, attracted Bengali terrorists. Disgusted with the ineffectiveness and the religious orientation of Bengali secret societies, Hemchandra Das went to Europe in 1906 to study explosive chemistry and revolutionary organization. He learned something of both but evinced no interest in anarchism, socialism, or other political and economic theories. At first he thought "anarchist" and "revolutionary" were synonyms, but when he learned "that anarchism implies a state of things in which everyone's will is law," he became disillusioned and stopped meeting with anarchists. He considered their ideal as impractical as spiritual *swaraj*. Das returned to India at the end of 1907 with a mass of revolutionary literature and an up-to-date bomb manual. Knowledge of explosives eventually became widespread in Bengal, so it may be said that this was the most important influence of European anarchism on the Bengali terrorists.¹⁵

Terrorism in India was preceded by an interest in physical culture, particularly wrestling, drill, and the use of the *lathi* (singlestick). Indigenous traditions of physical culture and martial arts had survived in many parts of India despite British attempts to discourage them. However, these traditions had almost entirely died out among the Hindus in Bengal. The Calcutta secret societies of the late nineteenth century wanted to improve "the national physique," but nothing much was done in this direction until a *samiti* for physical culture was founded around 1900. Soon other societies with similar aims were established. When Aurobindo Ghose and his lieutenant, Jatindranath Banerji, decided to popularize the idea of violent revolution, they worked through these *samitis* and planned

to establish secretly or, as far as visible action could be taken, under various pretexts and covers, revolutionary propaganda and recruiting throughout Bengal. . . . Societies of young men were to be established with various ostensible objects, cultural, intellectual or moral and those already existing were to be won over for revolutionary use. Young men were to be trained in activities which might be helpful for ultimate military action.

Banerji and his associates won over a number of existing *samitis*. He and Ghose thought that the program they had set in motion might take thirty

¹⁴ Sister Nivedita [Margaret Noble], *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, ed. Sankari Prasad Bose (Calcutta, 1982), 381; Datta, *Patriot-Prophet*, 118; Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Smritir Pata* (Leaves of memory) (Calcutta, 1370, Bengali era [1963]), 31.

¹⁵ Kanungo [Das], *Banglay Biplab Pracheshtha*, chap. 12.

years to result in an armed insurrection. Most of the recruits thought this too long and could not endure the military discipline that Banerji tried to introduce. Why go to the trouble of learning drill and *lathi*-play when you could blow up a train or a magistrate with a bomb?¹⁶

The lure of quick and impressive results explains why the Bengali secret societies turned from military preparations to the terrorist methods that became their stock-in-trade. The Bengalis claimed that this change of strategy was imposed on them by irresistible forces. In *Wounded Humanity*, an apologetic book published in 1936, Barin Ghose wrote, "India was still politically asleep. . . . Under such circumstances a small band of young and inexperienced dreamers goaded by want of resources and sympathy and egged on by scherning arm-chair leaders laid the first mine under the train carrying Sir Andrew Fraser, the sympathetic and popular Lieutenant Governor of Bengal." Some of this is hard to accept. Fraser was neither sympathetic nor popular. Yet Ghose clearly was fascinated by bombs and had no qualms about ordering their use. In *Banglay Biplab Pracheshta* (The revolutionary effort in Bengal), a more believable book, Hemchandra Das tells how Barin Ghose used to impress prospective donors with a pyrotechnic demonstration involving chlorate of potash taken from a bombshell.¹⁷

It seems true that the terrorists were goaded by popular demands for a dramatic reply to police brutality and official arrogance. In 1908, Barin Ghose confessed to a police officer that "there was a wide and persistent demand all over India for one successful political murder in order to stiffen the back of the people and satisfy their spirit of vengeance." Upendranath Bannerjee said much the same thing in his Bengali memoirs. After a series of arrests and sedition trials, people became so enraged that "everyone seemed to be saying, 'No. This can't go on. We've got to blow out the brains of one of these bastards.'" According to another memoir by a Bengali, there were two justifications for terrorism: "First, it brought a greater courage to the general public, even though it remained doubtful whether it helped relieve the oppression. Secondly, it gave people some satisfaction."¹⁸

Even after the turn to terrorism, hopes for a military insurrection were never abandoned. A distinction continued to be made between the military and terrorist branches of the Congress, but from 1906 until 1914 only the terrorist branch was active in Bengal. The outbreak of World War I led

¹⁶ Pal, *My Life and Times*, 313; Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, 23.

¹⁷ Barindra Kumar Ghose, *Wounded Humanity* (Calcutta, n.d. [1936]), 48–49; Kanungo [Das], *Banglay Biplab Pracheshta*, 118.

¹⁸ B. Ghose, confession before deputy superintendent of police, 3 May 1908, GOI HDA, May 1908, nos. 112–50, 27; Bannerjee, *Nirbasiter Atmakatha*, 17; Gupta, *Smritir Pata*, 35.

revolutionaries to hope that they could obtain military assistance from Germany. They did get some money, but the only significant attempt to smuggle weapons into India ended in disaster. Revolutionaries contacted the German consul in Jakarta, where arrangements were made for arms to be sent from the United States to the eastern coast of India. A German agent in New York purchased rifles and ammunition and had them shipped to San Diego, which were then to be transferred to another vessel bound for Jakarta and India. The arms were seized by U.S. authorities in Washington State, and British armed police trapped Bengali revolutionaries waiting for the shipment. The leader of the Bengali group, Jatindranath Mukherjee, is regarded in India as a national hero and was even praised by a British officer as "perhaps the boldest and the most actively dangerous of all Bengali revolutionaries."¹⁹

The first phase of terrorist activity in Bengal ended in May 1908 when Barin Ghose, Hemchandra Das, Upendranath Bannerjee, and more than thirty others were arrested after a failed assassination attempt. A few months after the assassination attempt, Lord Minto wrote to John Morley, British secretary of state for India: "The conspiracy is far better organized than I had ever imagined and though the idea of any attempt at revolution seems fantastical, there might, if we had not made the discoveries we have, have been something in the nature of simultaneous assassinations of Europeans followed by tremendous punishment by us. The dangers, which I hope we have avoided, are terrible to think of." The movement survived for the next three decades to play a significant role in the struggle for freedom. Though unsuccessful in practical terms, the early efforts of Ghose and his friends were not without results.²⁰

When the Indian Councils Act (Morley-Minto Reforms) was passed in 1909, people in Calcutta saw them as "the direct result of the [bomb] conspiracy." This was an exaggeration, but it is certain that the British became more willing to negotiate with the Moderates once the terrorists had shown the dangers of obduracy. The Extremists realized this: "Even diplomacy must have some compelling force behind it to attain its ends," declared a *Bande Mataram* writer, since "peaceful means can succeed only when these imply the ugly alternative of more troublesome and fearful methods, recourse to which the failure of peaceful attempts must inevitably lead." The government's next reform package, the Montagu-

¹⁹ Gupta, *Smritir Pata*, 35; India Office Records (London) MSS EUR D 709, "Nangla Dacoity Case Exhibits," 2; Rowlett *Report*, paras. 111–12; Guha, *First Spark*, 389–94.

²⁰ Minto to Morley, 17 December 1908, Morley Papers, India Office Library MSS EUR 573; GOI HDA, July 1909, nos. 3, 40–41.

Chelmsford Reforms, was announced in 1919 after another terrorist outbreak.²¹

After World War I Extremists who had been expelled from the Congress in 1907 were allowed to reenter the organization. The national movement thus blended the Extremists' active approach and demand for freedom with the Moderates' constitutional methods and willingness to compromise. Gandhi was the principal Congress leader from 1920. His method was passive resistance, what he called *satyagraha* (holding to truth). At the heart of this was *ahimsa* (nonviolence). To Gandhi, nonviolence did not mean "meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but . . . the pitting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant." He considered this the one true means by which India could attain *swaraj*, as well as the "only way . . . to stop terrorism."²²

Gandhi made this observation in a letter to a leading Moderate, but when he addressed the Extremists he took a different approach. At a public meeting in Calcutta late in 1920 he declared:

The whole history of British rule in India is a demonstration of the fact that we have never been able to offer successful violence. Whilst therefore I say that rather than have the yoke of a Government that has so emasculated us, I would welcome violence, I would urge with all the emphasis that I can command that India will never be able to regain her own by methods of violence.

While affirming that for himself nonviolence was a creed, Gandhi offered it to others as a policy. After some initial hesitation, most Bengali terrorists worked with Gandhi from 1920 to 1922, when a violent incident in Bihar caused him to called off the Non-Cooperation Movement.²³

During the quarter-century until the attainment of independence in 1947, the struggle for freedom was carried forward mainly through non-violent passive resistance. Nevertheless, numerous outbreaks of revolutionary terrorism, particularly in Bengal and northern India, kept British security forces constantly on the alert. In 1930, the temporary occupation of the government armory at Chittagong showed that Bengali revolutionaries had put their days of amateur bungling behind them. The next year the Congress assembly passed a resolution commending the bravery of

²¹ *Bande Mataram*, 24 April 1908, cited in Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee, *Sri Aurobindo and the New Thought in Indian Politics* (Calcutta, 1964), 376.

²² M. K. Gandhi, cited in R. K. Majumdar, *Struggle for Freedom* (Bombay, 1987), 297-8; Gandhi to D. Wachha, 25 February 1919, *Collected Works*, 15:107.

²³ M. K. Gandhi, speech at Kumartoli Park, Calcutta, 13 December 1920, *Collected Works*, 19, 102-03.

Bhagat Singh and two other terrorists who had been executed for their part in the assassination of a British police officer. The wording of the resolution became a bone of contention between Gandhi's group, which insisted on including a phrase dissociating the Congress from "political violence in any shape or form," and an anti-Gandhi faction that opposed this disclaimer. The controversy threatened to overshadow the discussion of the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement, the principal item of business on the Congress' agenda that year. Widespread support for Bhagat Singh and other revolutionaries led the official Congress historian to admit that "Bhagat Singh's name was as widely known all over India and was as popular as Gandhi's."²⁴

In 1930 Gandhi wrote that the "party of violence" was "as patriotic as the best among us," commending its members for having "much sacrifice to its credit." Knowing that they wanted action and not talk, he invited them to join his civil disobedience movement. This was the only way to attain "complete independence," the official Congress goal, and to "save the country from impending lawlessness and secret crime." Many terrorists answered his call. Those who did not added to the momentum of the movement by making Gandhi's nonviolent methods appear less belligerent than they were.²⁵

Although Gandhi never compromised his ideals by cooperating with the party of violence, he knew that much of his strength came from being perceived by the British as a lesser evil than men like Bhagat Singh. At London's Round Table Conference of 1931, Gandhi made it clear that if the government refused to work with him it would have the terrorists to deal with. Holding "no brief for terrorists," Gandhi made it clear, "If you will work the Congress for all it is worth you will say good-bye to terrorism."²⁶

Gandhi's only serious rival for Congress leadership during the 1930s was Subhas Chandra Bose, a Bengali who had been influenced by Aurobindo Ghose and Bengal's revolutionary terrorists during his youth. Although Bose never became an active revolutionary, he knew and sympathized with members of revolutionary groups like Anushilan and Jugantar. As head of the Calcutta Corporation, he gave jobs to men with revolutionary connections and "met with active revolutionaries and knew in a general way what they planned to do." Bose was imprisoned several times for his supposed connections with the terrorists or for acts of civil

²⁴ B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress* (Bombay, 1935), 1:456-7.

²⁵ Gandhi, "To the Indian Critics," 423.

²⁶ M. K. Gandhi, "Speech at Plenary Session of Round Table Conference," 1 December 1931, *Collected Works*, 48:358, 365.

disobedience. Like Gandhi, he emerged from jail with his popularity enhanced. Unlike Gandhi, however, Bose regarded nonviolence as a weapon to be used or discarded as circumstances dictated.²⁷

In 1938 Bose, the acknowledged leader of the Congress' left wing, was elected party president. The next year he successfully challenged Gandhi's candidate and won a second term, but Gandhi's supporters forced Bose to resign in April 1939. As the leader of the Forward Bloc, Bose continued his political work until his imprisonment in 1940 under the wartime Defence of India Act. Released after five months and kept under house arrest, Bose escaped from India and went first to Germany and then to Japan, meeting with Axis leaders in both countries. In 1943 he took up the leadership of the Indian National Army (INA), organized the previous year by another Bengali revolutionary. The INA, consisting mainly of Indian soldiers who had been captured in Southeast Asia, played a subordinate role in the unsuccessful Japanese siege of Kohima and Imphal in 1944. Militarily insignificant, the INA was thrust into prominence in November 1945 when some of its officers were court-martialed. The public outcry against these proceedings together with a localized revolt of the Royal Indian Navy convinced the British that the armed services could no longer be depended on to protect British interests in India. Clement Attlee, the British prime minister from 1945 to 1951 who presided over the final transfer of power, told a former Bengali judge that Bose's INA did much more than Gandhi's *satyagraha* to persuade him that it was time for Britain to pull out of India.²⁸

In 1909 the judge in the conspiracy trial of Barin Ghose and his associates spoke prophetically: "The danger of a conspiracy such as this lies not so much in its prospect of success as in its fruition. When once the poison had entered into the system it is impossible to say where it will break out or how far-reaching will be its effects." During the first two decades of India's independence there was little organized terrorism in the country, but during the late 1960s left-wing Bengali insurgents began using terrorist methods to achieve their revolutionary aims. The 1980s saw the rise of separatist terrorism in Punjab, Kashmir, and Assam as well as among ethnic Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka. As I write (late 1991) Assamese and Kashmiri terrorists hold hostages in their respective valleys, Punjabi terrorists account for a dozen or so killings every week, and a Sri Lankan Tamil group is being investigated in connection with the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. In the 1990s tensions between Hindus and Muslims have been worsened by extremist activists.

²⁷ Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj: A Biography of Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose* (New Delhi, 1990), 102, 115.

²⁸ P. B. Chakravarty, 30 March 1976, in English translation in Nimai Pramanik, *Gandhi and the Indian National Revolutionaries* (Calcutta, 1984), 9.

An immense gulf separates contemporary terrorists throughout the world from Europe's terrorists of the nineteenth century who targeted particular rulers and officials. Contemporary terrorists have been associated with random kidnappings, mass murders, and aims that are often more criminal than political. The terrorists in India today have more in common with the terrorists of contemporary Europe than with their more idealistic predecessors of the nineteenth century who, despite their many failures, contributed to India's divided freedom.²⁹

²⁹ Judgment in Alipore Bomb Case, 6 May 1909, in *The Alipore Bomb Trial*, ed. Bijoy Krishna Bose (Calcutta, 1922), 184; Walter Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism* (Boston, 1987), 4; David C. Rapoport and Yonah Alexander, *The Morality of Terrorism* (New York, 1982), 220.